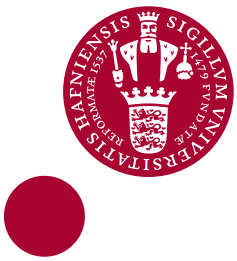

To Eat Like a God

Religion and Economy in Old Babylonian Nippur

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Owing to circumstances for which the editors assume full responsibility, and for which neither authors nor publisher are to blame, the contributions by Dominique Collon and John Curtis, John MacGinnis, and Frances Reynolds were not included in the materials originally submitted to the publisher. As a result, they appear at the end of volume 2 instead of at the appropriate alphabetical location in the publication.

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To Eat Like a God: Religion and Economy in Old Babylonian Nippur

NICOLE BRISCH

It is a great pleasure and a privilege to contribute to this Festschrift for Nicholas Postgate. I hope that he will accept this article as a small token of my gratitude for all his support during my time in Cambridge. Although this contribution will only include a minor discussion of archaeological evidence, this nevertheless is offered in the spirit of Nicholas's scholarship and the Cambridge tradition, which always sought to combine archaeological and textual evidence.[1]

More than any other ritual, the daily ritual of 'feeding the gods' is one that many Assyriologists, especially in the past, have found difficult to understand. The reasons for this are not entirely clear but perhaps may be found in the close association of Assyriology with Old Testament studies. Though Old Testament polemics against idol worship focused mainly on the production process of divine statues as a proof that they were idols rather than actual gods (see Berlejung 1998, especially 315–413), the feeding of such statues also caused some bewilderment among ancients and moderns alike.[2] In modern scholarship such attitudes can be identified as inherently Orientalist, since they betray a deficient appreciation of the nature of divine statues and the Mesopotamian notion of the divine. Selz (1997; 2008) has done much to help us gain a deeper understanding of divinity and the nature of Mesopotamian statues. It is proposed here that the daily ritual of 'feeding the gods,' through which a connection between religion and economy can be explored, can add a new facet to our perception of Mesopotamian religion.

Oppenheim's call[3] for systematic studies of the divine image and the caring for it in the form of food offerings is being heeded half a century after it was first published: a number of studies are now either exclusively or partly dedicated at least to the daily ritual of feeding the gods,[4] yet there is much that is still poorly understood, in particular regarding food offerings in the third and early second millennium BCE. The Mesopotamian ritual can be connected with several mythological tales. One of these tales, the Flood Story, has recently received an increased attention with the publication of a previously unknown manuscript that details the

1. I would like to thank J. A. Brinkman and N. Yoffee as well as the anonymous peer-reviewers for the comments.

2. For ancient bewilderment at this rite see Lambert 1993: 200 and Postgate 1994: 124–125, for testimonies of modern bewilderment see Römer 1969: 149 and Wiggerman 1995: 1862.

3. Oppenheim 1977[1964]: 183.

4. See, for example, Sigrist 1984; Lambert 1993; Bottéro 2001: 125–133; Maul 2008; 2013; Gaspa 2010; 2011a; 2011b; Waerzeggers 2010: 113–18; Sallaberger 2012.

building of the 'ark' (Finkel 2014). Two other mythological tales that connect the purpose of humanity's existence with service to the gods are the tale of Enki and Ninmah and *Enūma Eliš*. The importance of these tales for our understanding of the Mesopotamian religious ritual of 'Feeding the gods' has been pointed out several times (Lambert 1993; Maul 2008; 2013) and need not be repeated here. Suffice it to say that these myths explain that humanity was created by the gods to serve them and to provide them with offerings so that the gods would not have to 'do the work' by themselves. In return, the gods promised to not destroy humanity (again).

Yet there are other dimensions of this important ritual. Maul has focused on social and political aspects of this rite, in addition to its religious dimension (Maul 2008; 2013), and coined the term "Gottes-Ernährungsgemeinschaft" to describe this (Maul 2008: 81). In the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods, food offerings were an integral part of creating and maintaining a community to demarcate and stabilize the Assyrian state (Postgate 1992; Maul 2013). In Maul's words: "Der mit einer solchen Götterspeisung verbundene Gedanke einer Gemeinschaft, die die Menschen untereinander ebenso verbindet wie das Gottesvolk mit seinem göttlichen Herrn, wird zumindest der Gemeinschaft der Willigen Identität und Festigkeit verliehen und so schon in mittelassyrischer Zeit dem assyrischen Reich in nicht unerheblichem Maße zu innerer Stabilität verholfen haben" (Maul 2013: 574).

Such an interpretation of this rite as one that creates community is in line with recent interpretations in the field of religious studies. Bell (2009: 108–114), for example, classifies such daily offerings as 'rites of exchange and communion' and suggested that these rites "appear to invoke very complex relations between the human and the divine" (Bell 2009: 109). The complexity of human-divine relations is borne out by the Mesopotamian evidence: in particular the Babylonian Flood story shows that the relationship was one of mutual interdependence. Humans were indeed created to work for the gods and to provide them with all the goods they needed to be comfortable, but this also made the gods depend on humans: without humanity they had to work on their own, and, as the time before the Flood shows, this was not a successful enterprise.

The economic dimension of food offerings to the gods has not been adequately addressed to date. It is proposed here that gaining a deeper understanding of the economic aspects of religion could open up new perspectives on our understanding of Mesopotamian religion. The 'Sattukku' archive from Nippur, which records food offerings to gods and their redistribution, presents a unique opportunity to explore this connection between economy and religion further. On the one hand, there is the question of how food offerings contributed to the overall economy of a city-state, on the other hand it could help pursue the question of how the temple economy interacted with the community within which it was embedded. The following represents an exploration of this topic, which is likely to raise more questions than it answers.

The 'Sattukku' Archive

In 1984 Sigrist published a study of an archive from Nippur that recorded food offerings for deities and their redistribution to officials of temples and the palace. Though the term *sattukku* is not mentioned in every text, it does occur in many of them, and where it does not occur the similarities to those texts where it does occur are strong enough to indicate the cohesion of

this archive.[5] Though only 17 out of 428 tablets and fragments were published in the form of line drawings, Sigrist's study contained numerous tables, which summarized the contents. Kraus (1985: 526) already pointed out that it was probably the poor state of preservation that was one of the reasons for the lack of adequate publication (in addition to the repetitive character of the tablets). However, the importance of this archive, together with technological advances, especially in digital photography, makes the full publication of this archive a useful endeavour.[6]

The archive was excavated during the fourth and fifth postwar campaigns to Nippur and was discovered between the years 1954–56 (Sigrist 1984: 3; Kraus 1985: 526). It is well known that the archive was found as fill in a platform dating to the Parthian era and was found close to (but on top of) where the Ur III remains of the Inanna temple at Nippur were, thus the archaeological context offers little information on the precise institutional affiliation of this archive.[7] According to Sigrist (1984: 3–6) and others (for example, Postgate 1986: 238), the archive was originally part of the Ninurta temple administration, though Kraus (1985: 533) and Zettler (2003: 11–13) have raised doubts about this identification. Kraus observed that Ninurta's temple, the Ešumeša (translation unclear), is never mentioned in these texts, and Zettler pointed out additional difficulties based on the archive's archaeological context. Zettler (2003: 12–13) suggested instead that the archive may have been part of the Inanna temple and should be seen an example of cross-institutional temple administration. A third possibility, already briefly mentioned by Sigrist (1984: 192), is that the administration of temples was centralized throughout Nippur and that the archive therefore was not part of any particular temple administration but of some unnamed central authority that accounted for food offerings and their redistribution. A similar suggestion had been made by Robertson with regard to the administration of livestock at Nippur (Robertson 1981: 206). The archive itself offers little information to solve this question: Ninurta is frequently mentioned in prominent position amongst the divine recipients of food offerings; his throne is also mentioned as receiving offerings, usually in prominent position as well, as is the E'igišugalamma "House in front of Šu-galam",[8] probably part of Ninurta's Nippur temple, the Ešumeša. For the time being the question of institutional affiliation of the archive has to remain open and should be reconsidered in light of other administrative records from Nippur, in particular those from the late 19th century excavations, if and when they will become available.[9]

The term *sattukku*, loaned from the Sumerian compound verb sá — dug_4 "to deliver" (*kašādum* or *šukšudum* in Akkadian) is slightly complicated. Lambert (1993: 196) understood it to be a term referring to foods being handed out either to gods or to people on a regular basis, whereas Mayer and Sallaberger (2003–2005: 100) translate the term as regular "Lieferung," not

5. It is to be hoped that issues such as this will become clearer when the archive is published in full.

6. I am planning on making available all the tablets and fragments belonging to the archive that was analyzed and studied by Sigrist (1984). The complete archive will be published as a monograph, yet the continued archival work is subject to obtaining further funding.

7. For a discussion surrounding the location of the Ninurta temple at Nippur see Zettler 2003: 11–13.

8. George 1993: 105.

9. Anne Goddeeris (personal communication) will soon publish the Old Babylonian administrative texts from Nippur that are kept at the Hilprecht Sammlung in Jena.

only of materials for offerings, but also for other occasions.[10] Sigrist (1984: 183–189) gave an overview of the different uses of the term from the Early Dynastic IIIb until the Old Babylonian period and concluded that the term designates regular deliveries that are not necessarily of a religious nature. Kraus (1985: 528) suggested as a basic meaning "das, was man erhalten hat" and interpreted the accounts in this archive as 'balanced accounts,' in which the obverse designates the deliveries and the reverse the expenditures. However, whether this interpretation is correct remains subject to further research.

In addition to the poor state of preservation, the tablets are also hard to read, because they were written in a small and somewhat cursive script, which makes their decipherment extremely difficult. The entire archive is attested over a time-span of almost 80 years (Sigrist 1984: 197–201, also see Charpin 2010: 102 and n. 45). It is unusual for several reasons: one is that some of the tablets, a group that Sigrist called the '5-column tablets' ("tablettes à 5 colonnes" Sigrist 1984: 19), use tabular formatting for the first time in a more extensive manner (Robson 2004: 119). The significance of the invention and use of tabular formatting for the purpose of accounting and its advantages over the less efficient list-format have already been pointed out several times (Robson 2004; 2008: 163–4). In Robson's (2004: 116) terminology, the tables that appear in the Nippur archive should be classified as headed, formal tables with colophons, i.e. tables with vertical and horizontal rulings, headers, and colophons at the end.[11] The tabular formatting is only found on the obverse of these 5-column tablets, on the reverse the information is written in list form. The obverse consists of two columns, both of which have tabular formatting, but only the left column has proper headers (the right column, at least where preserved, shows no headers). The left column is sub-divided into 6 sub-columns, five of which describe quantities of foods (ninda "bread"; ninda-ì "short-bread"; eša "flour"; útu "a cereal"; kaš "beer") in their headers and the sixth contains the names or description of the recipients of these foods, in most cases a deity, sometimes a throne, a temple, or other objects (Sigrist 1984: 139–153). The second column consists of only three sub-columns, two of which may also describe quantities of foods (though it is unclear which foods) and the third contains additional divine names. The second column on the obverse usually ends in the entry sá-dug$_4$, which is written across the three sub-columns, though this entry is sometimes followed by additional quantities for deities.

The reverse of these 5-column tablets, though divided into three tablet columns, does not employ the tabular formatting. The first column always begins with the entry šà-bi-ta "from this" and then lists the human recipients of the foods, both temple and palace officials as well as other persons only identified by their name (Sigrist 1984: 155–173). Though the quantities of foods that were redistributed here are given in litres (sìla), the foods are not specified. In some cases the redistributed quantities are summarized in larger script in the upper left corner of the reverse, but this is not always the case. Usually, this part ends with the entry še-ba-àm, literally "it is rations," showing a clear designation for these redistributed food rations.[12]

10. *CAD* S, s.v. *sattukku* translates this term as: "food allowance, regular offering." *AHw* III, s.v. šattukku(m) translates "regelmässige Lieferung, r.s Opfer."

11. The other types of tablets, especially the 2- and 6-column tablets do not contain tabular formatting but the more traditional, list-form.

12. It is not yet possible to establish how often this phrase occurs on the tablets of this archive.

There is little information on the redistribution of food offerings in general (Mayer and Sallaberger 2003–2005: 98) and the 'Sattukku' archive represents an important source of information on this. It is interesting to observe that the recipients of the redistributed foods include both temple and palace officials, and thus the archive could represent an example of cross-institutional redistribution. However, as long as it is unclear where the foods that were used for the offerings came from, it is difficult to answer this question. The texts themselves offer no information about the provenience of the foods.

Among the religious personnel who received these rations are some priests and priestesses of high standing, for example, en, gala, NIN-dingir, lukur, and others (see Sigrist 1984: 160), though not all of the priests and priestesses occur together on each tablet. However, it seems by far the largest quantity of redistributed foods often goes to a unit named é-gal-tuš "palace-residents," though this is also subject to further research.

Religion and Economy

In spite of the gaps in our knowledge on some of the administrative procedures that lay behind the processes recorded in the Nippur archive, it may nevertheless offer an opportunity to closely study the relationship between religion and economy in the Old Babylonian period.[13] The emerging field of Economics of Religion may offer an opportunity to revisit some of the most contested questions pertaining to Mesopotamian economy in general and Old Babylonian economy in particular. What is meant here is not the study of temple economies, but rather the actual merging of religious and economic studies to arrive at a more refined picture of ancient Mesopotamian religion.[14] A particular focus here should lie on the study of human agents within these temple economies and how they interacted with their community.

Though the theoretical framework of the Economics of Religion may not necessarily be applicable to ancient Mesopotamia,[15] it may nevertheless offer an opportunity to rethink our approaches to ancient religiosity and economy. For example, scholars working in the Economics of Religion have suggested that "humans seek to gain the most reward at the least cost" (Iannoccone and Bainbridge 2010: 462). A particularly controversial claim within this emerging field is that "producers of religion," e.g., clergy, like consumers of religion, tend to maximize their profits (ibid. 464). However, profit, as understood there, refers to both economic and social rewards.

The phenomenon of Old Babylonian 'temple loans,' a type of loan in which a god, in most cases the god Šamaš, appears as the overt creditor, could serve as a testing ground for this hypothesis.[16] There are all in all more than two hundred of such temple loan contracts attested

13. I hope to explore these and other questions within the framework of a larger project on religion and economy in Nippur.

14. Older, simplistic ideas on the 'Sumerian temple economy' have to be considered obsolete now (Beld 2002; Schrakamp 2013).

15. Discussing the question of the nature of ancient economies and whether they were fundamentally different from modern economic systems would go far beyond the framework of this contribution. I refer to Van De Mieroop 1999: 105–22, Stol 2004: 904–908; Garfinkle 2012: 5–17, who have explained these debates much more eloquently than I could.

16. On temple loans see Harris 1960 and Charpin 2005 with further references.

thus far (Charpin 2005: 16), not all of which are considered here. To my knowledge, there are ten such temple loans known from Nippur.[17] Thus far, the only deities that appear in the temple loans from Nippur are Utu and Sîn, though there may be an additional instance of a temple loan from the "Gate of Ninurta" (see below).[18]

Although it is not always clear whether the human agents that were behind these temple loans were members of the clergy (Charpin 2005: 22–24), such loans nevertheless offer valuable evidence pertaining to how religious sentiments might have influenced economic behaviour, and thus such questions are indirectly relevant to gaining a better understanding of the beliefs that lie behind the ritual of feeding the gods. Harris already pointed out that some of these loan documents stipulate that the interest of the loan can be repaid in the form of food (offerings) to a god (Harris 1960: 132; see also Skaist 1994: 127–29). An example from Nippur for such a stipulation is the text *BE* 6/1 no. 20, unfortunately a badly broken tablet (obv. 2′ reads: máš-bi ì-gu$_7$-e "its interest he [sc. the god] will eat."). Another interesting text from Nippur is *PBS* 8/2 no. 127, in which a loan of grain is identified as "grain, the food of Šamaš" (obv. 2: še níg-gu$_7$ ^{d}utu), though it is not clear to me whether this describes that the purpose of the loan or a pledge for its repayment. Further down the text reads: "In the month of Šabāṭu he will repay Šamaš with food (offerings)." (obv. 5–7: iti zíz-a-ka níg-gu$_7$ šà ^{d}utu bí-ib-du$_{10}$-ga).[19] Both texts date to the reign of Samsuiluna, *BE* 6/1 no. 20 probably dates to the year Samsuiluna 1, and *PBS* 8/2 no. 127 dates to the year Samsuiluna 27, so they are both later than the 'Sattukku' archive.

Only three of the Nippur temple loans date to the time period of the 'Sattukku' archive and will therefore be considered here: they are *SAOC* 44, nos. 2, 3, 67. Two of these were found in the TA area of Nippur, one in the TB area. *SAOC* 44, no. 2 is a loan of seven shekels of silver from the god Sîn to a person named Šeškalla, son of Enlil-amah and stipulates an interest rate of 20%. The text is dated to the year Enlil-bāni Q.[20] According to Sigrist (1984: 195) there is a Šeškalla attested in the 'Sattukku' archive, though without patronymic, thus it is impossible to know whether the two are the same. The temple loan was found in the TA area, locus 230, of level XIIB in fill of House M (Stone 1987: 39–40 and 178).

17. In addition to those temple loans from Nippur mentioned in Harris 1960: 127 and 134, there are two, possibly three additional loans published by Stone (1987), bringing the total of such temple loans known from Nippur up to ten (to my knowledge). Two of the temple loans published by Stone were already mentioned by Harris (2N-T 130 and 3N-T 222). The temple loans published by Stone are: SAOC 44, no. 2 (3N-T 855 = IM 58765): silver loan of Sîn; date: Enlil-bani Q, see Sallaberger 1996: 191, interest rate = 20% (obv. 2–3: máš 10 gín 2 gín kù-babbar dah-he-dam); SAOC 44, no. 3 (3N-T 842 = IM 58753): silver loan of the gate of Ninurta [obv. 3: kù ká ^{d}nin-urta]; date: Sin-iddinam 7; no interest; a woman named Gud-ku, daughter of Nanna-manšum, appears as the creditor; SAOC 44, no. 28 (3N-T 222 = IM 58385): silver loan of Šamaš to Mar-erṣetim; Samsuiluna 1; no interest, to be repaid at harvest; SAOC 44, no. 39 (3N-T 868 = IM 58778): silver loan from the storeroom [obv. 2: kù-bi é-kišib-ta] from the god Šamaš to Ea-tayyar; no date; no interest; one of the witnesses is the god Sîn; SAOC 44, no. 67 (2N-T 130 = IM 57849): silver loan from the god Sîn to Anni-babdu; date: Rim-Sin 8; interest rate 20%, to be repaid at harvest.

18. The existence of a temple of Utu at Nippur has been debated (see most recently Richter 2004: 154–55). However, Utu regularly appears in the 'Sattukku' lists and the existence of prebends also indicate that he must have had a temple there. Richter's arguments indicate that even if Utu did not have a proper temple at Nippur he may have had a chapel that was part of the Ninurta temple.

19. For the use of the phrase šà DN –dug$_{10}$ in the sense of "to pay" see already Harris 1960: 130.

20. For a discussion of Enlil-bāni year names see Sallaberger 1996.

Whether text *SAOC* 44, no. 3 also is a temple loan is not entirely clear. The text was found in the TA area as well and is a loan of 1 shekel of silver with no interest (máš nu-ub-tuku). I have classified it as a temple loan, because it states that the silver belongs to an entity called ká ^{d}nin-urta "gate of Ninurta." To my knowledge, this particular gate is only attested in one other text,[21] but in analogy to similar gates that were part of temples at Nippur,[22] one could interpret this as a part of Ninurta's temple. As the creditor appears a woman named Gudku, daughter of Nannamanšum, the debtor is a man named Šešaldu, son of Ibiya. Whether Gudku was a priestess at or an agent for the Ninurta temple cannot be established at this point. The text is dated to the year Sîn-iddinam 7 and was found in TA 205 level XIIB, also in fill (Stone 1987: 40 n. 25).

Stone (1987: 71–74) suggested that TA was an area in which mainly small property owners lived, who–though not directly affiliated with the temples–were involved in temple business. This is in contrast to the TB area, in which residents who were most likely administrators for the temples but not property owners lived (Stone 1987: 101). Whether this suggestion will turn out to be correct, is also subject to further research.

The third temple loan that falls within the timespan of the 'Sattukku' archive is *SAOC* 44, no. 67, which dates to the year Rīm-Sîn 8. It is also a temple loan by Sîn,[23] the amount borrowed is 1 shekel of silver, and the debtor's name is Anne-babdu (no patronym). The interest rate here is again 20%. The text was found in the TB area (locus 30, level I-3, Stone 1987: 185), though the context seems to have been disturbed.

Though none of the persons mentioned in the temple loans discussed above are mentioned in the 'Sattukku' archive, other connections exist. Two of the temple loans were made by the god Sîn, who, though not amongst the most important deities worshipped at Nippur, was nevertheless of some importance (Richter 2004: 148–151). That Sîn had a temple at Nippur is fairly certain (see Richter 2004: 148 and n. 659), and there are also indications that there was an en-priestess for his worship at Nippur (Richter 2004: 150). Whether the en-priestess was involved in giving out temple loans is unclear. Sîn is also regularly mentioned in the 'Sattukku' archive as a recipient of food offerings, often in a fairly prominent position, usually in fourth place, after Nuska but before Enki and Inanna.

Charitable Loans?

Is it possible to interpret such temple loans as charitable acts by temples and their human agents to help people in times of need? If so, could they be interpreted as acts in which religious motivations influence economic behaviours?

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21. UM 29–15–946 obv. 3, transliterated by Robertson 1981: 338. The text is dated to Rīm-Sîn 31, thus a couple of years after the last text from the 'Sattukku' archive. The context is somewhat obscure, but the reverse mentions fodder for donkeys of Enlil and Ninurta, see Robertson 338f. I owe this reference to Thomas Richter.

22. See, for example, ká ^{d}nin-líl (Richter 2004: 55) and ká ^{d}en-líl (Richter 2004: 47–8).

23. Contra Stone (1987: 219) one can clearly see from the very good copy provided by Stone (plate 73) that the name of the deity providing the loan is Sîn ($^{d+}$EN.ZU) and not Enlil, though the signs /zu/ and /líl/ are sometimes difficult to distinguish. This would also be in line with other temple loans, in which the divine creditors are usually Utu or Sîn.

The two temple loans by Sîn both show an interest rate of 20%.[24] However, the loan of the "Gate of Ninurta," if it was a temple loan indeed, was interest-free. Though it cannot be proven at this point, the likelihood that the human agents of these temple loans were priests or priestesses is quite strong. That Šamaš often appears as a creditor has been explained with his role as the god of justice and the presumably charitable aspects of such temple loans. The moon god's appearance in these temple loans, though less frequent, could be explained with similar reasons. The exclamations i-^{d}utu and i-^{d}nanna, both interpreted as "cries for justice" or "cries of distress," show that the sun and the moon god were appealed to for justice or when in need (Charpin 2005: 20).[25] Though Ninurta normally does not appear in these loans, at least to my knowledge, the mention of a part of his temple here could be explained as a local Nippur phenomenon, since in some cases patron deities of cities were also known to have given such loans (Charpin 2005: 20).

The small sum that often appears in these temple loans combined with the lack of interest that appears in at least some of them has led many to conclude that such temple loans were of a charitable nature. However, more recently it has been argued that only some of the temple loans were charitable, while others had a commercial purpose (Veenhof 2004: 554–5; Charpin 2005: 32–33). A sub-type of temple loan shows a particular clause, which has been frequently discussed, the 'šalmu-balṭu' loans (Harris 1960: 133–37; Skaist 1994: 172–80; Veenhof 1987: 58–62; Charpin 2005: 26–7). Only one such loan document from Nippur has this particular clause albeit in Sumerian (*PBS* 8/2, no. 150). While the loan documents do not always tell us whether a loan may have been charitable or commercial, it is clear that temples also engaged in commercial activities (Veenhof 2004), which perhaps should not come as a surprise.

Is it possible to interpret such loans as attempts by the clergy to "maximize profits," either economically or socially? This is a difficult question to answer. If an interest rate is stipulated, as it was in two of the three temple loans discussed above, the loan may still have had a charitable purpose of lending someone silver who may not have had other means to secure a loan. If a loan was given without interest, the charitable aspect appears more clearly. And if the interest could be repaid in the form of food offerings, the temple (and the larger) community could benefit from this as well. If Stone's interpretation of the two different Nippur neighbourhoods is correct, the find spots of the three temple loans discussed above would indicate that the recipients of temples loans at Nippur were both people involved in temple business as well as temple administrators.

Rather than interpret such temple loans as attempts at profit-maximization on the part of the clergy, either to increase the temple's revenue or to increase religiosity amongst the population, they could be interpreted as attempts by the temple to keep a community in balance. The new economic realities of the Old Babylonian period, in which economies were much less controlled than in the preceding Ur III state (Yoffee 1995: 297–98), must have changed the social realities considerably. An example may be the growing problem of debts and associated

24. *SAOC* 44, no. 2: máš 10 gín 2 gín kù-babbar; *SAOC* 44, no. 67: máš 1 gín igi-6-gál 6 še. Both interest rates indicate 20%. For the first expression, which is also known from other Nippur texts, see Skaist 1994: 108. For the second expression see Skaist 1994: 106–7.

25. See *CAD* I: 144, s.v. *inannû*, and 317, s.v. *iutû*.

debt-slavery, which forced kings to periodically issue annulments of debts (see, e.g., Van De Mieroop 2002: 168). According to Charpin (2005: 28–9) the royal edicts that annulled debts also affected temple loans, possibly also an indication that they were not entirely charitable. Though loans in the Old Babylonian period are complex and also served to facilitate the circulation of goods, it is clear that some loans were made to relieve economic distress.

Temples were responsible for feeding the gods, but also for sustaining a substantial part of the city community, be it through employing parts of the population as craftsmen or agricultural workers, for example, or through priestly offices. On a religious level, feeding the gods kept them content and kept the cosmological balance, as the Flood Story and other mythological tales show. In ancient Mesopotamia this was also important, because an angry god could be the cause of multiple problems, such as disease, poverty, destruction, defeat, etc. On an economic level, feeding the gods contributed to feeding parts of the population, at least those who were employed by the temples and by the palace, but, as the temple loans show, it also enabled temples to accumulate capital that allowed them in some cases to help people in need, though it is uncertain to what extent this happened. Though this contribution ends with more questions than answers, it is to be hoped that these questions and more can be studied further in the future.

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